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ABSTRACT

This paper is an invitation to critically engage in the discussion of "indigenous knowledges" and the implication for academic decolonization. Among the issues raised are questions of the definition and operationalization of indigenous knowledges and the challenges of pursuing such knowledge in the western academy. The paper draws attention to some of the nuance, contradictions, and contestations in affirming the place of indigenous knowledges in the academy. It is pointed out that indigenous knowledges do not "sit in pristine fashion" outside of the effects of other knowledges. In particular, the paper brings new and complex readings to the term "indigenous," maintaining that different bodies of knowledge continually influence each other to show the dynamism of all knowledge systems. It is argued that when located in the Euro-American educational contexts, "indigenous knowledges" can be fundamentally an experientially-based, non-universal, holistic, and relational knowledge of "resistance." In the discussion, the paper interrogates the notions of tradition, authenticity, orality, and the assertion of indigenous identity as crucial to the educational and political project of affirming indigenous knowledges. (Contains 65 references.) (Author/SM)

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RETHINKING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES IN THE ACADEMY

George J. Sefa Dei

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the implication for academic decolonization. Among the issues raised are questions of the definition and operationalization of Indigenous knowledges and the challenges of pursuing such knowledge in the Western academy. The paper draws attention to some of the nuances, contradictions and contestations in affirming the place of Indigenous knowledges in the academy. It is pointed out that Indigenous knowledges do not 'sit in pristine fashion' outside of the effects of other knowledges. In particular, the paper brings new and complex readings to the term 'Indigenous' maintaining that different bodies of knowledge continually influence each other to show the dynamism of all knowledge systems. It is argued that when located in the Euro-American educational contexts, 'Indigenous knowledges' can be fundamentally an experientially-based, non-universal, holistic and relational knowledge of 'resistance'. In the discussion, the paper interrogates the notions of tradition, authenticity, orality and the assertion of indigenous identity as crucial to the educational and political project of affirming Indigenous knowledges.

INTRODUCTION

My intent in writing this paper is to engage in conversations on the topic of 'Indigenous knowledges' and their roles in the academy. I see the discursive project of 'Indigenous knowledges' as a way to rupture the sense of comfort and complacency in conventional approaches to knowledge production, interrogation, validation and dissemination in Euro-American educational settings. I acknowledge a personal complicity in this. I begin the discussion with what may arguably be read as a problematic statement. I maintain that within Euro-American institutions of learning conventional/traditional paradigms, differential social locations and the relative positioning of intellectual subjects constrain many of us from being subversive, resistant and challenging of dominant and/or 'stable' knowledge. Thus, to speak about Indigenous knowledges and the decolonization of the Western/Euro-American academy is to take personal and collective risks. Let me tell you about one individual who refused to take such risks and why. It is a story about a minority faculty member who met with the students in his class for the first time. A young student pestered the professor with critical questions about the importance for all who are minoritized in society to rupture the educational status quo, rather than to accept the normative social order. Finally, the professor felt he had heard enough of the student's radical critiques. He turned to him and with a pointed finger made it unambiguously clear, "Listen, young man, let me remind you that I have a mortgage to pay. Haven't you heard about peaceful co-existence?" To no one's surprise, the young student left the class and never returned.

Perhaps, before going further, I need make it perfectly clear that I have a personal, political and academic interest in speaking about Indigenous knowledges and their roles in Western academies. Generally, this interest is shaped by the realization of the urgency of rethinking the processes of delivering education in Euro-American contexts. This paper then, in a sense, may be read as a provocation as well as an invitation to dialogue about education and the way our academies produce and legitimate 'knowledge'. I define 'education' in a very broad sense to include the varied options, strategies and ways through which people come to know and understand the world and act within it. By 'academy', I mean schools, colleges and universities. Moreover, the collective 'we', to which I refer includes all who read this paper and share in the politics of decolonizing schools, colleges and universities so as to recognize the legitimacy of different forms of knowledges.

I should also clarify from the outset that this paper makes largely a normative argument. Nonetheless it is acknowledged that empirically one can point to spaces and sites (albeit a few) within the Western academy where some of the ideas presented here are being implemented. The focus on providing an empirical basis for the discussion could be subject of another text. Furthermore, while I concede that there may be multiple uses of Indigenous knowledges (e.g., using such knowledge to maintain a way of life that serves specific interests of gender, class, ethnicity, religion), this paper has an explicit political project that must not be lost. It is intended to use Indigenous knowledges for the political purposes of academic decolonization. As stated elsewhere (Dei 1999a), I come to a discussion of Indigenous knowledges through an educational journey replete with experiences of colonial and colonized encounters that left unproblematized what has conventionally been accepted in schools as 'in/valid knowledge'. My early educational history was one that least emphasized the achievements of African peoples and their knowledges both in their own right, and also for the contributions to academic scholarship on world civilizations. Like many others, I engage the topic of 'Indigenous knowledges' with a deep

concern about the historical and continuing deprivileging and marginalizing of subordinate voices in the conventional processes of knowledge production, particularly (but not exclusively), in Euro-American contexts.

My goal in this paper is to affirm Indigenous knowledges, well aware of the challenges, dangers and misreadings that come with the project. I seek to draw attention to some of the nuances, contradictions and contestations in the project and to firmly assert that Indigenous knowledges have a place in the academy. Indigenous knowledges do not 'sit in pristine fashion' outside of the effects of other knowledges. Rather than repudiate 'Indigenous' I bring new and complex readings to the term. Today we speak of the 'hybridity' of knowledges. The fact that different bodies of knowledge continually influence each other shows the dynamism of all knowledge systems. The 'Indigenous' is never lost. The interplay of different knowledges is perhaps one of many reasons why Indigenous knowledges must be taught in the academy. The goal of integrating (i.e., centring) Indigenous knowledges in the academy is to affirm this collaborative dimension of knowledge and, at the same time, to address the emerging call for academic knowledge to speak to the diversity of histories, events, experiences and ideas that have shaped human growth and development. And, if we recognize that knowledge is not static but rather constantly being created and recreated in context, then Indigenous knowledges needs to be an integral part of the ongoing co-creation and re-creation of academic knowledge/work.

Furthermore, as an African scholar in a Western academy I see the project of 'decolonization' as breaking with the ways in which the [African] indigenous human condition is defined and shaped by dominant Euro-American cultures, and asserting an understanding of the indigenous social reality informed by local experiences and practices. Bringing Indigenous knowledges into the Euro-American academy, an institution of power and influence in this increasingly interconnected world is ever more critical in this 'information era.' My learning objective in Indigenous knowledges is to develop a critical epistemology to account for the production and validation of critical knowledge for decolonization purposes. My investment in the 'Indigenous knowledges' project is to rupture normalized categories of what constitutes valid/invalid knowledge, and simultaneously to recognize that all knowledges are contested in terms of boundaries and spaces. At the same time, while it is important to avoid rendering a false binary or moral evaluation between good (indigenous)/ and bad (conventional/Western) knowledges, the objective is nonetheless to challenge imperial ideologies and colonial relations of knowledge production that continually characterize and shape academic practices. There is also a realization that knowledge is operationalized differently given local histories, environments and contexts. The exclusion of Indigenous knowledges from the academy within the Euro-American context of knowledge production leaves the space for the colonization of knowledges and cultures in local environments and contexts unchallenged. Such a project becomes even more critical given the power imbalance between groups that own and have access to the technology of knowledge dissemination. The academy's privileged position in this regard entails a corresponding responsibility to include indigenous knowledges in the dynamic process of knowledge generation and dialogue.

II. DEFINITIONS, BOUNDARIES AND OPERATIONALIZATION

A working definition of Indigenous knowledges, encapsulates the common-**good**-sense ideas and cultural knowledges of local peoples concerning the everyday realities of living.

These knowledges are part of the cultural heritage and histories of peoples (see Fals Borda, 1980; Fals Borda and Rahman1991; Warren, Slikkerveer and Brokensha 1995). I refer, specifically, to the epistemic saliency of cultural traditions, values, belief systems and world views that, in any indigenous society are imparted to the younger generation by community elders. Such knowledge constitutes an 'indigenous informed epistemology'. It is a world view that shapes the community's relationships with surrounding environments. It is the product of the direct experience of nature and its relationship with the social world. It is knowledge that is crucial for the survival of society. It is knowledge that is based on cognitive understandings and interpretations of the social, physical and spiritual worlds. It includes concepts, beliefs and perceptions, and experiences of local peoples and their natural and human-built environments.

More specifically, the term/notion 'indigenous' refers to knowledge resulting from long-term residence in a place (Fals Borda 1980). Roberts (1998) offers a clear conceptualization of 'Indigenous' as knowledge ".....accumulated by a group of people, not necessarily indigenous, who by centuries of unbroken residence develop an in-depth understanding of their particular place in their particular world" (p. 59). 'Indigenous' signals the power relations and dynamics embedded in the production, interrogation and validation of such knowledges. It also recognizes the multiple and collective origins as well as collaborative dimensions of knowledge and affirms that the interpretation or analysis of social reality is subject to differing and sometimes oppositional perspectives (Dei, Hall and Goldin-Rosenberg 1999).

In an excellent paper, Castellano (1999) identifies three broad aspects of Aboriginal knowledge relevant to the discourse of all Indigenous knowledges: traditional knowledge, which is inter-generational knowledge passed on by community elders; empirical knowledge, which is based on careful observations of the surrounding environments (nature, culture and society); and lastly, revealed knowledge, which is provided through dreams, visions and intuition. The primary characteristics of Indigenous knowledges are that they are personal/personalized, (i.e., there are no claims to universality); trust in knowledge is tied instead to integrity and the perceptiveness of the 'speaker'. Such knowledges are also orally transmitted, and their sharing is directly related to considerations of the responsibility in the use of received knowledge. Indigenous knowledges are experientially-based and depend on subjective experiences and the inner workings of the self to generate social interpretations, meanings and explanations. Indigenous knowledges are also holistic and relational. Such knowledge forms relate the physical to the metaphysical realms of life. They connect economic, cultural, political, spiritual, ecological and material forces and conditions. Indigenous epistemologies are grounded in an awareness and deep appreciation of the cosmos and how the self/selves, spiritual, known and unknown worlds are interconnected. The appreciation of the outer self and space is connected to an understanding of the inner sense of self (see also Ermine 1995). The dimension of spirituality in Indigenous knowledges provides the strength and power in physical communication. Indigenous knowledge forms are expressive and narrative. They are metaphorical in the use of proverbs, fables and tales. Indigenous knowledges view communalism as a mode of thought, emphasizing the sense of belongingness with a people and the land they share. It is not individualized and disconnected into a universal abstract. It is grounded in a people and a place.

III. TOWARDS A CRITICAL DISCURSIVE APPROACH: DECOLONIZATION AND THE ANTICOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

Recent trends in postmodernism and postcolonial theorizing represent a paradigmatic

shift in the sense of rejecting universal, simplified definitions of social phenomena which would normally infuse a decontextualized, essentialized reality. The focus is shifted to the complexity of lived experience. Rather than searching for broad generalizations, we must look for local, specific and historically informed analyses grounded in spatial and cultural contexts (see also Seidman 1994). In a sense, (as many have observed), the postmodern discursive practice disrupts social and intellectual hierarchies, and dismantles essentialism and foundational knowledge. Prah (1997: 16) states that postmodernity would defy "consensual rationality, hierarchy and order" that would act as "universal systems of thought". Whereas postmodern discourses bring to the fore questions of identity, difference and representation and the problem of decontextualized power, postmodern theorizing, on the whole, denies collective histories, except as "individualized renditions and interpretations of experience" (Prah 1997: 16). Thus, it is important to use and yet challenge postmodernism that ends up oversubjectivizing, individualizing and privileging certain narratives and subject voices. According to Sara Suleri (1992) there is also a distinction that needs to be made between those who control the discourse and those who resist. In other words, she asked: where is the interplay between those who control discourse and those who resist (see also Bhabha 1990)? In fact, postmodernism neglects larger political-economic questions (see also Parpart 1995), and forms the world into separate enclaves/entities without connections or shared values and norms. For those of us who speak of a decolonization project, such a fragmented stance can be problematic. The noted discontinuities and fragments are indeed part of a unified experience.

It is in the context of the above that the relevance of critiques of postcolonial theory[1] resides. Postcoloniality focuses on the interplay between imperial/colonial cultures and the colonized cultural practices. As a discursive framework, postcoloniality views "colonialism as an ideological and discursive formation... an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation" (Slemon 1995: 46). It is argued that an examination of colonial histories of marginalized communities is a necessary component of the process of decolonization. However, as a discourse, postcoloniality disturbingly ignores the indigenous histories of Southern peoples, which must be centred in any analysis of contemporary imperial relations. A transformative dialogue must be centred by speaking of colonized peoples' situated understandings of their histories. We cannot shift that centre to a neutral or border ground, for if the focus of our work is to be anti-oppression, then the understanding of colonization must be grounded to the colonized.[2] Ghanaian literary critic, Ama Ata Aidoo, is particularly blunt on this point when she argues that postcoloniality is increasingly becoming a "cover-up of a dangerous period in our people's lives" (Ama Ata Aidoo, cited in Zeleza 1997: 17). Other interesting questions remain: who is the postcolonial subject?; why is post-colonial theorizing 'appealing' to Western academies unlike other critical emancipatory discourses such as 'Afrocentricity', anti-colonial theory and Indigenous knowledges? Postcolonial theory has become a meta-theory by essentializing 'difference' and thus, risks idealizing and essentializing the human subject by privileging the individuation of the self. Postcolonial theory dehistoricizes and homogenizes human identities as totally/completely fragmented, multiple and transient. In so doing, postcoloniality negates/repudiates the repressive presence of collective oppressions, colonial exploitations and group marginality, as well as the shared histories of collective resistances of marginalized groups (see Zeleza 1997). Chisti (1999: 16) notes that dangers of "falling into the traps of complete unilateral fragmentation around difference", a discursive position that also shows so-called anti-essentialist discourses have the tendency to be essentialist positions. Postcolonial discourse is not immune to the critique.

Resistance is never autonomous. There is potential for resistance within the structures of power and knowledge (see Foucault 1980, 1983; Prakash 1992; Moore, 1997). A knowledge of how power relations are articulated in societies, rather than the mere maintenance of power for itself, illuminates indigenous forms of colonial resistances and how such knowledge retains relevancy in understanding contemporary social relations and social change. Frantz Fanon (1963) long ago insisted that decolonization can only be understood as a historical process that ultimately culminates in changing the social order. It is an initial violent encounter of two forces, "...opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies" (36). Moreover, Fanon adds that decolonization is a calling into question of the whole colonial situation and its aftermath. Thiophene (1995) also argues that decolonization is a "process, not arrival; it invokes an on-going dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European ...[imperial].... discourses and their [anti]-colonial dis/mantling" (95). A decolonization project in the academy must be aware that the colonization process and colonizing tendencies accede a false status to the indigenous/colonial subject through the 'authority of Western knowledge' at the same time as Indigenous knowledges are deprivileged, negated or devalued.

Regimes of power/knowledge work to differentially position individuals in the academy. A critical reflection of all knowledge systems points to their sites and sources of possibilities as well as to their limitations. Indigenous knowledges (de)construct narratives of and about differences. The relevance of 'identity discourse' in Indigenous knowledge production is that identity has implications, both within a discursive context, and within the spaces/lenses we inhabit and through which we engage ourselves as historically situated individuals/collectivities in social practices.

Therefore, Indigenous knowledges are appropriately discussed within an anti-colonial discursive framework. This framework is both a counter/oppositional discourse to the denial and repudiation of the repressive presence of colonial oppression, and an affirmation of the reality of recolonization processes through the dictates of global capital. Like postcolonial theory, an anti-colonial framework is a theorization of issues, concerns and social practices emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath. However, anti-colonialism uses Indigenous knowledges as an important entry point. As a theoretical perspective, anti-colonialism interrogates the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures and histories of knowledge production and use. It is an epistemology of the colonized, anchored in the indigenous sense of collective and common colonial consciousness. 'Colonial' is conceptualized, not simply as 'foreign' or 'alien', but rather as 'imposed and dominating'. An anti-colonial discursive approach would recognize the importance of locally produced knowledges emanating from cultural histories and daily human experiences and social interactions. It sees marginalized groups as subjects of their own experiences and histories (see Memmi, 1969; Fanon, 1963; and also Foucault, 1980). This approach would point to the relevance of using local languages and indigenous cognitive categories and cultural logic to create social understandings. The approach would also draw upon and combine indigenous literature with politics, culture, history, economic and understandings of spirituality. It draws and builds on work that is being done in communities and by minoritized scholars in reintegrating local and native languages in the education of the young, in the study of language and literature, in publication of texts, in nurturing, supporting and publishing indigenous writers in the academies and indigenous literary circles, encouraging that the work not only be reflective of the cultures but written in local languages (see wa Thiong'o, 1986).3

An anti-colonialist approach is also a celebration of oral, visual, textual, political and material resistances of colonized groups – a shift away from a sole preoccupation with victimization. It offers a critique of the wholesale degradation, disparagement and discard of 'tradition' and culture' in the interest of so-called 'modernity' and the 'global space'. There is a site of/in tradition, orality, visual representation, material and non-material cultures and Aboriginality that is empowering to colonized and marginalized groups. It is such a politicized evocation of cultures and traditions that resonates with a genuinely decolonizing project. It is only by according a discursive integrity to subjects' accounts (validating their voice/words/language) of their histories and cultures that colonial imperialist projects can be destabilized.

An anti-colonial discursive approach begins by questioning institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations. It acknowledges the role of societal/institutional structures in producing and reproducing inequalities that are based on race, class, sexual and gender location. A key argument is that institutional structures are sanctioned by the state to serve the material, political and ideological interests of the state and economic/social formation. However, power and discourse are not possessed entirely by the colonizer and the dominant. Discursive agency and power to resist also reside in/among colonized groups (see also Bhabha,1995). For example, subordinated/colonized populations had a theoretical and practical conception of the colonizer with which to engage social and political practice and relations. Contact between the 'imperial order' and the 'colonial' periphery continues to involve complex and creative encounters/resistances (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Thiopene, 1995). The myriad resistances help sustain the local human conditionalities of the colonized 'other'.

Ideas/notions of 'nation', 'community' and 'citizenship' are not simply imagined constructs, but are real in their meanings and evocations with profound consequences for colonized and marginalized groups working in Western/Euro-American academies. Thus, I agree with Homi Bhabha, cited in Parry (1995:43), that an anti-colonial discourse "requires an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it". Anti-colonialism questions the practice of reading the histories of Southern peoples strictly in demarcated stages (i.e., periodization of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial epochs). It calls for theorizing Southern issues beyond their artificial boundaries. For example, seeing Africa beyond the boundaries created by colonial authorities and making the necessary internal and external linkages with local groups and Diasporic and other colonized peoples. An anti-colonial stance requires that the knowledge producer be aware of the historical and institutional structures and contexts which sustain intellectualism and intellectual projects. For example, whereas postcolonial theorists depend on Western models, anti-colonial theorists work with alternative/oppositional paradigms based on the use of indigenous concepts and analytical systems and cultural frames of reference.

IV. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES IN THE ACADEMY: BASIC CHALLENGES

a. 'Structural Hegemonic Rupturing': Knowledge and Representation, Curricular and Pedagogical Reforms

A profoundly challenging task in the academy is to facilitate the recognition and validation of the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledges as a pedagogic, instructional communicative tool in the

processes of delivering education. The challenge starts with hiring Indigenous and racial minority scholars to join teaching faculties and to integrate Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum, as well as into the instructional and pedagogic practices of educators and learners. The praxes of inviting/supporting diverse physical bodies and addressing the question of knowledge representation involve systemic change. Furthermore, to achieve a genuine synthesis of all existing knowledges, the academy must work with the idea of multiple, collective and collaborative dimensions of knowledge. In a more politicized sense, I speak of 'synthesis' as shifting to a restructured and reconstituted space, where issues of knowledge content and physical representation are addressed in such way as to recognize the multiplicity of human ideas. Synthesizing different knowledges will be an educational practice that leads to systemic change rather than to a remedial patchwork of unsustained efforts. 'Synthesis' is not simply opening up the 'club' to new members, but rather, examining the whole idea/structure of the club.

In order to initiate the process, there are certain critical questions to be asked -- Is the distinction between 'traditional thought' and 'modern scientific thought' false or relevant? What does it mean to 'synthesize' two or more knowledge systems? What are the central concerns of each knowledge system? Are indigenous moral and cognitive conceptions compatible with Western science? How do we arrive at meaningful and genuine theories (discursive frameworks) that take into account different philosophical traditions (e.g., Western and Indigenous thought)? Can we use another's language to attain a deeper conceptual and philosophical understanding of the 'other's knowledge system(s)? These are relevant questions because, historically, Western philosophical traditions have provided the dominant theoretical frameworks for structuring social science knowledge and research[4].

Today a small but growing number of indigenous scholars are seeking not only to write and publish about the philosophical, literary, scientific traditions of their places, but also, to do so in their local languages (see for example Anzaldúa, 1990; Philip, 1989; wa Thiong'o, 1986) . Specifically in Canadian contexts, Native/Aboriginal communities and historians are rewriting their histories to (re)claim not only a past which was excluded in the history of the colonial nation (i.e., Canada), but also, to name the colonial historical period from the perspective of their places and their peoples. Such decolonization activities also have direct implications for rewriting curriculum. Similarly, on-going work presents education in Indigenous societies through a world view that is integrated within the community. Education is not constrained by the age segregation of a classroom or the isolation of mother and child in the home; learning is imparted to the younger generations by elders such that it is an integrated part of a community's social, spiritual/ancestral and natural environment(s). Education in this context is intergenerational and part of a holistic, respectful communal view of belongingness and learning; such a perspective could be viewed as moving beyond 'opening up the club to new members' toward restructuring the view of education as it has been defined by the state in a classroom.

To integrate Indigenous knowledges into Western academies is to recognize that different knowledges can co-exist, that different knowledges can complement each other, and also that knowledges can be in conflict at the same time. A falsely dichotomous thinking between 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous' knowledges can be avoided by understanding that the 'past/traditional' and the 'modern' are not frozen in time and space. The past continues to influence the present and vice versa. There is a continuity of cultural values from past experiences that helps shape the present. Similarly, the present also influences the narration of the past. There are important reasons for working towards a synthesis of different knowledge

systems. Aside from issues of partiality and uncertainty of knowledges, there is the inadequacy of scientific knowledge (both Indigenous and Western) to account for the complete histories of ideas and events that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and social development. In fact, the worlds of the metaphysical and the physical, the worlds of mystery/'invisible agents' and the worlds of 'science' and 'modernization' are not 'oppositional realities' (Prah 1997: 20). Thus, different knowledges represent different points on a continuum, they involve ways peoples perceive, and act in, the world.

Different forms of knowledge (e.g., knowledge acting as superstition, or a belief in the invisible order of things, or knowledge serving mediation and intervention processes and purposes, and the question of what is perceived to be 'science') are all built upon one another in support of the idea of Indigenous knowledges as cumulative. Through daily social practice, human societies freely 'import' and 'adapt' customs and ideas from the 'outside' to enrich their accumulated bodies of knowledge. Even as local peoples present their Indigenous cultures for external consumption they are able to combine an intimate knowledge of their societies with the complexities and particularities of modern world systems (see also Errington and Gewertz 1989: 52). In effect, there is 'modernity' embedded in Indigenous knowledges. We can also speak of the capacity of Western scientific knowledge to incorporate indigenous thoughts. For example, indigenous thoughts and knowledges have long been appropriated by Western scientific knowledge and other knowledge that Westerners acquired in contact with indigenous societies and peoples but without acknowledging the collectivity and ongoing collaborative nature of knowledge creation in dialectic exchange; rather, in the tradition of individualized ownership and land claims, Western researchers often integrated Indigenous knowledges into theories as their own innovations.[5]

While not denying intellectual agency on the part of Indigenous peoples, we must deal with the historic inferiorization of Indigenous experience and the devaluation of rich indigenous histories and cultures, or what may be called the 'entrapment/enslavement of the human mind'. The resilience of indigenous cultural heritage, as well as the local confidence in, and customary usages of, Indigenous knowledges are constantly being undermined by a "Western cultural overkill" (Prah 1997: 18). The cultural imperialism of 'neo-colonialism' exacts a psychological damage to the self/collective that calls for decolonizing minds (wa Thiong'o 1986).

A pedagogic, instructional and communicative approach to synthesizing different knowledges must first allow Indigenous peoples to produce and control knowledges about themselves, their communities and their societies. Indigenous peoples must own their past, culture and traditions. They must stand in their past, histories and cultures and use Indigenous knowledges as a basis for contributing to a universal knowledge system. As Prah (1997: 21) again opines, the process of decolonization requires that Indigenous peoples confront the "...insulting idea that others know and understand them better than they understand themselves". The maintenance of local languages is crucial because the road "...to authenticity ...cannot be reached in speech forms which lie outside the [indigenous] cultural world of the writer" or speaker/narrator (Prah 1997: 21).

Resistance is a spatial practice. Homes, families, communities, workplaces and schools are differentially implicated in an exercise to integrate different knowledge systems. It is within the academy that Indigenous knowledges may lodge a sustained critique of the dominance of Eurocentricity. Definitions of a place/locality and belongingness are not fixed, but imagined and fiercely contested. Individuals and groups construct their own sites and spaces of resistance. Spaces are contested because they constitute places for producing knowledge, ideas, images and

for imagining (see also Said 1993: 7). With the academy as one of the most important starting places, we must address the following issues in everyday classroom pedagogic, communicative and instructional practices (see also McLeod and Krugly-Smolska 1997: 16-17, in another context):

i. First, developing an awareness of Indigenous knowledges (e.g., discussing the topic with students, use of Indigenous guest speakers, resource materials, posters, displays and films; targeting Indigenous concerns and issues in classroom discourses; undertaking research trips to Indigenous communities; and planning cultural celebrations – all to be placed in appropriate histories and contexts, etc.) to serve as a form of decolonized education, and also to speak to the atrocities of the colonial encounters between the subject and the colonizer.

ii. Second, developing advocacy and support networks to promote hiring Indigenous faculty; helping the learner acquire critical thinking skills to question the absences from the syllabus of Indigenous writings/texts on the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages, myths, legends and philosophies.

iii. Third, developing a sustainable community action (e.g., memberships and linkages with Indigenous community groups; seeking guidance from Indigenous communities).
iv. Fourth, initiating political actions (e.g., protests, submissions to university administrations; rewarding communitarian approaches to learning and schooling; holistic and intuitive thought, as well as varied ways of decoding information).

For any of these pedagogic/instructional, communicative and political stances, we must clearly define the guiding principles, objectives and goals, establish a plan of action and develop a list of resources to use. We must also develop ideas about probable outcomes, and who we see as crucial agents of change responsible for executing action plans (McLeod and Krugly-Smolska, 1997: 18). Philosophically, some tensions and ambiguities in teaching Indigenous knowledges will also have to be addressed.

b. <u>The Claim to Tradition and Authenticity:</u>

The claim to a 'traditional past' and an 'authentic voice' that may be implicit in Indigenous knowledges has often been a point of critical interrogation. The interrogation is offered in two aspects: first, whether there is a voice of authenticity which is not open to challenge, and second, whether there is a claim of 'indigenousness'**<u>6</u>** that 'invents' a mythic, idealized past. I borrow from the discursive themes and ideas espoused some time ago by Keesing (1989) and Briggs (1996) to interrogate what could be called the 'production/construction of indigenity'. I am working with a knowledge of 'invention' which engages the contexts and interests that inform the construction of the past in the present, rather than as reference to the mere accuracy with which a reconstructed past reflects/represents historical events (Briggs 1996: 463; see also Hanson 1989; Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). Also, by 'authentic' I mean the claim to [re]present a 'true or real' (not staged) culture, past, tradition or voice on the past that is not subject to questioning.

There is little doubt that Indigenous peoples can speak about authenticity in more powerful ways than 'outsiders'. However, there are dangers of unproblematically privileging the subject positions which we occupy. Even the learner as an Indigenous subject has knowledge

that is intersected with 'Western' knowledge. This is one of the reasons why any claim of authenticity must always be questioned. An interrogation is not tantamount to a denial, vilification or open dismissal of tradition. Admittedly however, questions of culture, identity, home and location all have significant bearing on the production and legitimation of all knowledges (Trask 1991). As Briggs (1996) argues, there are broader political-economic contexts that could shape the designation of discursive authority. The discourse of Indigenous knowledges that recreate and reclaim tradition in the present actually reflects contestations of multiple interests (race/ethnicity, class, culture, gender) more than the "...cultural essence of a purportedly homogenous and bounded traditional group" (Briggs 1996: 435). It is important that in a discussion of Indigenous knowledges and particularly on the issue of authenticity, we do not set up class, gender and power interests as more salient that race/ethnicity and colour (see Keesing 1991).

The issue of an authentic voice is tethered to the question of who has discursive authority on Indigenous knowledges. It is a concern about the politics of representing Indigenous scholarship. For example, anthropologists and non-Indigenous scholars have lost 'ethnographic authority' as Indigenous peoples increasingly redefine and reassess their relations with Western academic scholars[hip]. The issues of misrepresentation and appropriation of local cultural resource knowledges have ensured that Indigenous peoples redefine the notion of 'ethnographic authority' in their own terms (see also Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Crick 1985). Indigenous peoples are demanding the respect for the right to tell and 'publish' their stories. They are making these demands particularly in situations where authorship is seen as an index/marker of the unique creativity and resourcefulness of individual writers, who for the most part, have been, and continue to be 'outsiders' (see also Cruikshank 1992).

The indigenous past reflects the history, customs, cultural practices, ideas and values handed down from one generation to the next generation. It is this past that constitutes the group's cultural identity. An important question is how do we define the 'real past' if we accept that culture is not a "passively inherited legacy", and also, that cultures and traditions are constructed in particular social and political contexts? (Linnekin 1992: 249-250). Recognition of situational, contextual, historical and political embeddedness of culture should lead us to the understanding that the Indigenous is not an undifferentiated category. It is a term that is contested and articulated in multiple ways, none of which implies that we cannot speak of the 'Indigenous'.

c. <u>Indigenous Knowledge as Counter-Hegemonic Knowledge:</u>

Within the Western academy Indigenous knowledges can be presented as counter-hegemonic knowledges. Keesing (1989) alludes to the Gramscian argument that "...counter-hegemonic discourse pervasively incorporates the structures, categories and premises of hegemonic discourses ... because ...those who are dominated internalize the premises and categories of the dominant ... [and]... also because the discourse of domination creates the objective, institutional realities within which struggles must be fought" (p. 23). This is an unfortunate and perhaps an unavoidable situation/position. Yet, the problem arises when the argument is overstretched: that counter-hegemonic discourses can themselves become hegemonic. How is this possible when critical discourses are still marginalized in our academies and, in fact, do not have the same space and the institutional structures and resources that support and reproduce conventional hegemonic discourses? A case in point is the marginalization of

oppositional discourses like Afrocentricity in the academy.

Keesing (1989) further argues that contemporary Southern representations of their own cultures and traditions have been shaped by "...colonial domination and the perception of Western culture through a less direct reactive process, a dialectic in which the elements of Indigenous culture are selected and valorized (at the levels of both ideology and practice) as counters to or commentaries on the intrusive and dominant colonial culture" (Keesing 1989: 23). This claim may be closer to an argument that Southern intellectuals conduct selective [mis]capturings of elements of their own past, histories and traditions for valorization and celebration so as to strikingly differentiate the 'Indigenous' from the non-Indigenous/West. In the contexts of African intellectual scholarship, this assertion is similar to the critique offered against Negritude and Afrocentric theorists who decry the colonization and recolonization of the African intellectual space. While affirming the ideational as well as socio-cultural differences between alternative knowledge systems (see Horton 1967), we must guard against romanticism, overglorification and fetishization of the past as [sacred] anthropological truths.

I will reiterate that while we need to be aware of this dialectic, we must correspondingly acknowledge the fundamental philosophical differences and distinctions in knowledge systems. The idea of ownership of knowledge is not a central principle of Indigenous knowledge systems. Thus, for example, normative claims made of African knowledge systems does not mean these cannot be shared by other Indigenous communities. Scheurich and Young (1997) highlights the ontological, epistemological and axiological positions that may characterize different knowledge systems. The **ontological** position speaks to the primary assumptions that people (within given cultures) have/make about the nature of reality. In African systems of thought, the ontological viewpoint stresses that to understand reality is to have a complete or holistic view of society. The view stresses the need for a harmonious co-existence between nature, culture and society. There is the idea of mutual interdependence among all peoples such that the existence of the individual/subject is only meaningful in relation to the community that she or he is part of. On the other hand, the **epistemological** position enthuses that there are different ways of knowing about reality. Thus, in African systems of thought, knowledge is seen as cumulative and as emerging from experiencing the social world. Practice and expereince are seen as the contextual basis of knowledge. Knowledge is for survival and both go hand in hand. While membership in community accords rights there are important matching responsibilities. The **axiological** position maintains that there are "... disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values...[that is]... presumptions about the real, the true and the good" (Scheurich and Young, 1997:6). In African systems of thought therefore cultural, spiritual and ideational beliefs, values and practices are evaluated in the history and contexts of communities as societies strive to set their own moral tone. While these ideas may be shared by other Indigenous peoples, it is the privileging of certain core social values for 'reward' (e.g., responsibilities over rights; community over individual; peaceful co-existence with nature over control or domination of nature) that sets different knowledge systems apart. An understanding of such differences and their dialogic dimensions is relevant in developing a basis on which to work towards a general synthesis of knowledge systems. For me, and many others, the Indigenous past offers a means of staking out a position as African, which is outside of the identity that has been, and continues to be, constructed by Euro-American ideology (see Muteshi 1996).

There is a further contention that Southern, and particularly, postcolonial intellectuals have themselves been "heavily exposed, through the educational process, to Western ideologies

that idealize primitivity and the wisdom and ecological reverence of those who live close to Nature" (Keesing 1989: 23). In other words, in academic and political projects Southern intellectuals promote Indigenous knowledges and engage in problematic fetishized representations of their cultures on the basis of false anthropological knowledges which were instrumental in exoticizing Indigenous cultures. Hence, Indigenous scholars assert an identity based on an idealized romanticized past. As already discussed, the past is not frozen in time and place. No tradition is immune to criticism (Scanlon 1964). We must correspondingly acknowledge and speak about the sources of empowerment and disempowerment in the past, and its cultural traditions. We must also acknowledge the Indigenous capacity to exercise intellectual agency and to engage in self-reflexive knowledge production. In this context, exercising intellectual agency means engaging in a process of recuperation, revitalization and reclamation of African Indigenous knowledge as a necessary exercise in empowerment. We cannot underestimate the power of ideas in terms of the role of social forces to generate relevant knowledge for collective resuscitation, spiritual rebirth and cultural renewal. Thus, a discursive project affirming the 'past' cannot unproblematically be interpreted as a call to retrogress to a previous state of 'primitivity'. It should be read as a political agenda to interrogate the African past, culture, tradition and history in order to learn from the sources of empowerment and disempowerment as African peoples search for ways towards the future.

On the whole, I believe Indigenous scholars should reclaim aspects about their cultures and traditions which can be narrated as wholes and fundamentally human. They need to do so in order to affirm and to resist an amputation of their past, history and cultures from themselves. This ought to be distinguished from the 'exoticization' of cultures and traditions of which anthropologists and non-Indigenous writers historically were guilty . Symbolic violence can ensue after Indigenous people reclaim identities based on their histories, cultures and traditions, and then, once they have presented these identities, Indigenous peoples have little or no control over how they are read, used and manipulated. In their relations with dominant society, Indigenous peoples have represented themselves in particular ways only to be labelled as 'inauthentic' and 'deficient'. For example, rather than try to understand the practical meanings and theoretical relevance of such notions as holism, mutuality and spirituality, these are interpreted as essentialized categories and/or anthropological fictional representations of the Indigenous and the Indigenous social practice. Ideas of holism and spirituality are not fixed nor frozen in time and space. Indigenous cultures bring meanings to social actions depending on contexts and histories. In one Ghanaian community, my research has shown how ideas about spirituality involve changing meanings of one's place in society, and the dynamic relations between the self, personhood, society, culture and nature (Dei, 1999b). Understanding the self as a 'whole person' means the self in multiplicated and yet connected to the collective. The self is a spiritual, emotional, cultural and psychological being, as well as a physical and material embodiment (Miller, 1989, 1997; Dei, 1999c).

d. Contested Knowledges: The Politics of Place and the Re-Assertion of Indigenous Identity

The maintenance of cultural autonomy has been a "powerful resource in providing the ideological context in which [Indigenous peoples] are framing their 'new' world" (Nash 1997: 33). Stuart Hall (1991), reminds us that a theory is not truth, but must be seen as a "set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges which have to be debated in a dialogical way"

(286). To paraphrase Moore (1997: 91), Indigenous knowledges presented as 'text' or 'theory' do not reside in a fixed, static metaphoric site or space removed from practice, performance, power and process. In fact, the Indigenous identity resides within the 'situated [political] practices through which identities and places are contested, produced and reworked in particular localities" (Moore 1997: 87). However, Indigenous struggles cannot be understood exclusively as questions about identity. The re-creation of indigenity is linked to the possession of space, land and language, and the pursuit of politics and economics. Thus, economic, political, symbolic and spiritual considerations need to be taken into account in order to move beyond Eurocentric interpretations of indigenousness. Some of the greatest challenges facing Indigenous peoples globally are the violations of their knowledges of survival, their rights to land, cultures and traditions, and the maintenance of a connection to the spiritual as well as contemporary material realms of life. In Canada and elsewhere, Native land claim struggles are part of this challenge. Despite the violations of their land claims over the centuries, they have found the collective and spiritual strength in their integrated connection to the land and that has been a story of survival, resistance and struggle to reclaim their spiritual, material and collective claims to the land that has continued to this day. It has included legal challenges to validate oral testimonies as evidence in the courts.

e. <u>Representing Orality in the Academy</u>

Orality is a primary mode of communication in Indigenous communities. Also employed are visual representations such as pictographs (e.g., paintings on rocks), and Indigenous writing/communicative forms such as petroglyphs (e.g., carvings or inscriptions on rocks). One example of a contemporary challenge in bringing Indigenous knowledges into the academy is the question of how best to convey spoken words (as narrated in stories, fables, myths and oral accounts of life histories) from another culture. Cruikshank (1992) notes that there are issues of language and cognition with significant pitfalls and implications for understanding 'Indigenous knowledges'. Spoken words as stories, fables, proverbs, myths, folklore and folksongs have long been treated as 'objects' to be collected, coded, stored and/or disseminated. Can cultural knowledge considered "linguistic expression and material manifestation of ideas" be collected, represented and/or stored without losing meaning (Cruikshank 1992: 5-6)? Fluency in the local language is critical to textual representation of the oral.

Rosaldo (1980: 91) has argued that we must see oral traditions as texts to be heard, not as documents to be stored. Bearing this in mind two key questions can be posed: i). What happens to the spoken words when they appear on paper, or are "recorded in magnetic or digital codes on tapes, disks or in film or videotape" (Cruikshank 1992:5)?, and ii). What are uses of material artifacts and exhibitions, stories and oral accounts as written texts in Western academies? Oral traditions, stories, fables and proverbs collected from Indigenous communities and written as texts in Western academies can be become a material manifestation of the colonial encounter (Trigger 1988 cited in Cruikshank 1992: 5). Once located in Western academies, cultural artefacts become "symbols of cultural oppression" since these institutions are places that have historically participated in colonizing the 'other' (e.g., the processes of academic imperialism through the establishment of knowledge hierarchies in which of certain histories, traditions and values as well as epistemologies prevail) (see also Cruikshank 1992: 8). Spoken words (now viewed as part of material culture) have also become parts of current debates about 'cultural/intellectual property rights' and representations of culture. Since words are said in

given contexts/locations, there is a problem of 'decontextualization' when they are produced in print or as texts. Orality can be 'frozen' in writing or through the written text.

Moreover, we need to ask ourselves other related questions: what is the socio-political context of gathering spoken words?; what are the social conditions under which spoken words are collected, interrogated, produced and used as written texts (see Cole 1985)? Cruikshank (1992:6) further argues that "physical things and words wrenched from their social and cultural setting become part of another semiotic sphere that cannot be redressed by contextual parading". In other words, myths, stories, folksongs, folklore and other oral/narrative accounts have a continuing life of their own, more so when they are produced as texts. For example, many complexities and nuances of myth making, such as the processes through which myths enter into social life, are integral to the production of Indigenous knowledge. When such knowledges are reproduced, myths come to acquire a whole repertoire of social, cultural and political activities relating to their (myths) narration and celebration. It is important therefore, to be sensitive to the context (i.e., social setting and political situation') in which the spoken word is collected, presented and consumed in a written form.

Finally, other questions lead us to begin to understand how the receiver/responder is located: What are the processes of framing, interpreting and understanding spoken words before and after they appear on paper/print/text? How do subjectivities and political projects come into play? For example, can text (emerging from the spoken word) be represented and interpreted to expose colonial encounters rather than as the mere glorification of voices/arts, (i.e. Western museums and recent controversies).

V. CONCLUSION

The cultural revitalization taking place today in many marginalized and Indigenous communities is an affirmation and a reclaiming of the past (and its cultures and traditions) which has been historically demonized by colonizers. Yet more importantly, this cultural revitalization is a repudiation of European colonization, imperial relations and Western civilization and consumerism (Trask 1993: 188). Indigenous knowledges have generally been excluded from Western academies. Nevertheless, this paper illustrates the legitimate value of such knowledges in their own right, and their relevance for critically interrogating hegemonic knowledge systems within schools, colleges and universities in Euro-American contexts.

Ultimately, we have to consider the role of Indigenous knowledges in the academy as primarily one of 'resistance' to Eurocentrism; that is, resistance to the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge as the only valid way of knowing. It is resistance to Eurocentricism masquerading as a universal body of thought. I interpret resistance as referring to the social actions and practices of subordinate groups (and their allies) that contest hegemonic social formations and knowledges, as well as unravel and dislodge strategies of domination (Haynes and Prakash 1991: 3). Kellner (1995: 42) cautions against the 'fetishization of resistance'. Abu-Lughod (1990) also reminds us of "...the tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated" (cited in Moore, 1997:89). My use of resistance is closer to Parry's (1994) who points to Frantz Fanon and Amy Cesaire's work and their "...unwillingness to abstract resistance from its moment of performance" (p. 179) [cited in Moore, 1997: 89]. Moore (1997) correctly alludes to the "...importance of historical, cultural and geographical specificity to any understanding of resistance" (p. 89). He further understands the limitation of

placing the focus on the'intentions' of, rather on than the consequences of, everyday human action and social practice (p. 89).

Moore (1997) holds that we must explore alternative conceptions of resistance, "...[r]ather than measuring resistance against a yardstick of widespread social and political economic transformation, the micro-politics of tactical manoeuvers... [take] center stage" (p. 90). In other words, we must view resistance in the academy as collective actions and strategies for procedural and incremental change. Resistance starts by using received knowledges to ask critical questions about the nature of the social order. Resistance also means seeing 'small acts' as cumulative and significant for social change. As one of my Caribbean-born, African graduate students wrote, "...I can't tell you how affirming it is to see 'patois' in the books I am evaluating for my thesis. A few years ago, this would never have been possible...The fact that these languages make their way into texts at all is a phenomenal act of resistance. Of course, I realize that the use of local languages outside their appropriate contexts opens up a whole new set of challenges" (Lawson 1998).

In thinking of Indigenous knowledges as 'resistance knowledge' we must acknowledge how easy it is to be complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic Eurocentric and colonized knowledges in the academy. By failing to speak out about Indigenous knowledges we have become complicit in the continued marginalization and negation of such knowledges in the academy. The integration (that is, centering) of Indigenous knowledges into the curricular, instructional and pedagogical practices of Western academies cannot be an unquestioned exercise. We must consider how power-saturated issues of academic social relations are used to validate different knowledges to serve particular interests.

Of course, we must also be wary and critical of the integration of Indigenous knowledges into the academy if it is pursued to serve the interests of the modern state and corporate capital. We must be concerned about the exploitative tendencies of Western academies in order to affirm the status quo. Indigenous knowledges should be critical and oppositional in order to rupture stable knowledge. However, our caution and cynicism should not lead to us to claim a separate space for Indigenous knowledges in/outside the academy. We must be careful that our academic practice and politics do not feed on the marginality of Indigenous knowledges. Maintaining a separate space for Indigenous knowledge feeds on the problematic idea that Indigenous ways of knowing/knowledges sit in a pristine fashion outside of the effects of other bodies of knowledge. In fact, varied knowledge forms belong in the academy. Hence, we must understand our individual and collective academic complicities in creating this marginality by our failure to speak about multiple knowledges in curricular, instructional, pedagogic and textual practices. We must center the varied, alternative and sometimes oppositional discourses and knowledges systems in our academic communicative and pedagogical practices.

As Trask (1993) rightly observes, sometimes because of the power of capital we may not easily understand our own cultural degradation because we are living in it, and "...[a]s colonized people[s], we are colonized to the extent that we are unaware of our oppression" (p. 195). We may start to destabilize what constitutes 'valid' academic knowledge by challenging the political economy of knowledge production that accords different costs and privileges to knowledge systems. If scholars fail to recognize the social, political, cultural and personal implications of academic colonization, and the erasure/appropriation of Indigenous knowledge, then perhaps it is a futile exercise indeed to explore such knowledges within the academy.

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NOTES

1. The institutionalization of postcolonial studies in the academy marks a transformation of the study and analysis of colonialism and world history. Postcolonialism may be defined as "a new designation for critical discourses which thematize issues emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath" (Shohat, 1992: 101).

2. This is Freirian position in which the dialogue occurs on the ground of the oppressed and not on the ground of the oppressor; as Freire spoke, nor can a position be neutral – otherwise we support the oppressive regime.

3. Note the work of Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) who actually retrained himself to write in his native language after having become known as an English writer. The next generation, as he proposed in his text, should not have to go through the difficult process of learning to write in its native language during adulthood. Schools should be building students' bi- tri- and multi- lingual skills. The academy has much work and learning to do in the area of language learning, maintenance and acquisition from the perspectives and needs of speakers of non-European or non-dominant international languages.

4. As Cruikshank (1992:8) points out, we must also be aware of the pitfalls of essentialism that attribute "...ideas and concepts to the 'Indigenous voice' even when the words are actually being supplied by a[n] Eurocentric ideology".

5. Threadgold (1997: 20), in her excellent work entitled Feminist Poetics, speaks of the problem of traditional scientific writings not disclosing the process of knowledge creation, including trial and error and the different influences on thinking, but rather presenting knowledge production as abstract/or scientific fact.

6. By 'indigenousness' I mean a knowledge consciousness arising locally and in association with a long-term occupancy of a place. Such consciousness emerges from an awareness of the intellectual agency of local subjects and the capacity to use knowledge to challenge, rupture and resist colonial and imperial relations of domination and, as well, to resuscitate oneself from mental bondage. Indigenousness also accords a broader definition of identity to local subjects.

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